

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal
CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS
WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

No. 515. NEW SERIES. SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1878. PRICE TWOPENCE.

VIXEN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," &c. &c.

CHAPTER II. RORIE IS TAKEN TO TASK.

"It is not dogs only that are jealous!" thought Roderick, as he went home in the brougham, with all the windows down, and the cool night breeze blowing his cigar smoke away into the forest, to mix with the mist wreaths that were curling up from the soft ground. It was an offence of the highest rank to smoke in his mother's carriage, but Rorie was in an evil temper just now, and found a kind of bitter pleasure in disobedience.

The carriage bowled swiftly along the straight, well-made road, but Rorie hated riding in a brougham. The soft padded confinement galled him.

"Why couldn't she send me my dog-cart?" he asked himself indignantly.

Briarwood was a large white house in a park. It stood on much higher ground than the Abbey House, and was altogether different from that good old relic of a bygone civilisation. Briarwood was distinctly modern. Its decorations savoured of the Regency; its furniture was old-fashioned, without being antique. The classic stiffness and straightness of the First French Empire distinguished the gilded chairs and tables in the drawing-rooms. There were statues by Chantrey and Canova in the spacious lofty hall; portraits by Lawrence and Romney in the dining-room; a historical picture by Copley over the elephantine mahogany sideboard; a Greek sarcophagus for wines under it.

At its best, the Briarwood house was commonplace; but to the mind of Lady Jane Vawdrey, the gardens and hot-houses

made amends. She was a profound horticulturist, and spent half her income on orchids and rare newly-imported flowers, and by this means she had made Briarwood one of the show places of the neighbourhood.

"A woman must be distinguished for something, or she is no better than her scullery-maid," said Lady Jane to her son, excusing herself for these extravagances. "I have no talent for music, painting, or poetry, so I devote myself to orchids; and perhaps my orchids turn out better than many people's music and poetry."

Lady Jane is not a pleasant-tempered woman, and enjoys the privilege of being more feared than liked; a privilege of which she makes the most, and which secures her immunity from many annoyances, to which good-natured people are subject. She does good to her poor neighbours, in her own cold set way, but the poor people about Briarwood do not send to her for wine and brandy as if she kept a public-house, and was benefited by their liberal patronage; the curate at the little Gothic church down in the tiny village in a hollow of the wooded hills does not appeal to Lady Jane in his necessities for church or parish. She subscribes handsomely to all orthodox well-established charities, but is not prone to accidental benevolence. Nobody ever disappoints her when she gives a dinner, or omits the duty call afterwards; but she has no unceremonious gatherings, no gossiping kettle-drums, no hastily-arranged picnics or garden-parties. When people in the neighbourhood want to take their friends to see the orchids, they write to Lady Jane first, and make it quite a state affair; and on an

appointed afternoon, the lady of Briarwood receives them, richly clad in a dark velvet gown and a point-lace cap, as if she had just walked out of an old picture, and there are three or four gardeners in attendance to open doors and cut specimen blossoms for the guests.

"She's a splendid woman, admirable in every way," said Roderick to an Oxford chum, with whom he had been discussing Lady Jane's virtues, "but if a fellow could have a voice in the matter, she's not the mother I should have chosen."

Ambition was the leading characteristic of Lady Jane's mind. As a girl, she had been ambitious for herself, and that ambition had been disappointed; as a woman, her ambition transferred itself to her son. She was the eldest daughter of the Earl of Lodway, a nobleman who had been considerably overweighted in the handicap of life, having nine children, seats in three counties, a huge old house in St. James's Square, and a small income—his three estates consisting of some of the barrenest and most unprofitable land in Great Britain. Of Lord Lodway's nine children, five were daughters, and of these Lady Jane was the eldest and the handsomest. Even in her nursery she had a very distinct notion that, for her, marriage meant promotion. She used to play at being married at St. George's, Hanover Square, and would never consent to have the ceremony performed by less than two bishops; even though the part of one hierarch had to be represented by the nursery hearth-broom. In due course Lady Jane Umleigh made her debut in society, in all the bloom and freshness of her stately Saxon beauty. She was admired, and talked about, and acknowledged as one of the belles of that season; her portrait was engraved in the Book of Beauty, and her ball programmes were always filled with the very best names; but at the end of the season, Lady Lodway went back to the Yorkshire Wolds with a biting sense of failure and mortification. Her handsome daughter had not sent her arrow home to the gold. She had not received a single offer worth talking about.

"Don't you think you could consent to be married by one bishop and a dean, Jenny, if the marquis comes to the scratch in the shooting season?" asked Lady Jane's youngest brother derisively.

He had been made to do bishop in those play-weddings of Lady Jane's, very often when the function went against the grain.

The marquis thus familiarly spoken about was Lord Strishfogel, the richest nobleman in Ireland, and a great sea-rover, famous for his steam yachts, and his importance generally. He had admired Lady Jane's statuesque beauty, and had been more particular in his attentions than the rest of her satellites, who for the most part merely worshipped her because it was the right thing to do. Lord Strishfogel had promised to come to Heron's Nest, Lord Lodway's place in the Wolds, for the pheasant-shooting; but instead of keeping his promise, went off to the Golden Horn, to race his yacht against the vessel of a great Turkish official. This was Lady Jane Umleigh's first disappointment. She had liked Lord Strishfogel just well enough to fancy herself deeply in love with him, and she was unconscious of the influence his rank and wealth had exercised upon her feelings. She had thought of herself so often as the Marchioness of Strishfogel, had so completely projected her mind into that brilliant future, that to come down to her maiden position again from that vivid dream of conquest and gratified ambition, was as sharp a fall as if she had worn a crown and lost it.

Her second season began, and Lord Strishfogel was still a rover. He was in the South Seas by this time, writing a book, and enjoying halcyon days among the friendly natives, swimming like a dolphin in those summery seas, and indulging in harmless flirtations with dusky princesses, whose chief attire was made of shells and flowers, and whose untutored dancing was more vigorous than refined. At the end of that second season, Jane Umleigh had serious thoughts of turning philanthropist, and taking a shipload of destitute young women to Australia. Anything would be better than this sense of a wasted life and ignominious failure.

She was in this frame of mind when Mr. Vawdrey came to Heron's Nest for the shooting. He was a commoner, but his family was one of the oldest in Hampshire, and he had lately distinguished himself by some rather clever speeches in the House of Commons. His estate was worth fifteen thousand a year, and he was altogether a man of some mark. Above all, he was handsome, manly, and a gentleman to the marrow of his bones, and he was the first man who ever fell over head and ears in love with Jane Umleigh.

The charms that had repelled more frivolous admirers attracted John Vawdrey.

That proud, calm beauty of Lady Jane's seemed to his mind the perfection of womanly grace. A wife to adore upon his knees, a wife to be proud of, a wife to rule her vassals like a queen, and to lead him, John Vawdrey, on to greatness.

He was romantic, chivalrous, aspiring, and Lady Jane Umleigh was the first woman he had met who embodied the heroine of his romantic dreams. He proposed and was refused, and went away despairing. It would have been a good match, undoubtedly—a truth which Lord and Lady Lodway urged upon their daughter—but it would have been a terrible descent from the ideal marriage which Lady Jane had set up in her own mind, as the proper prize for so fair a runner in life's race. She had imagined herself a marchioness, with a vast territory of mountain, vale, and lake, and an influence in the sister island second only to that of royalty. She could not descend all at once to behold herself the wife of a plain country gentleman, whose proudest privilege it was to write M.P. after his name.

The earl and countess were urgent, for they had another daughter ready for the matrimonial market, and were inclined to regard Lady Jane as an "old shopkeeper," but they knew their eldest daughter's temper, and did not press the matter too warmly.

Another season, Lady Jane's fourth, and Lady Sophia's first, began and ended. Lady Sophia was piquant and witty, with a snub nose and a playful disposition. She was a first-rate horsewoman, an exquisite waltzer, good at croquet, archery, billiards, and all games requiring accuracy of eye and aim, and Lady Sophia brought down her bird in a single season. She went home to Heron's Nest a duchess in embryo. The Duke of Dovedale, a bulky, middle-aged nobleman, with a passion for field sports and high farming, had seen Lady Sophia riding a dangerous horse in Rotten Row, and had been so charmed by her management of the brute, as to become from that hour her slave. A pretty girl, with such a seat in her saddle, and such a light hand for a horse's mouth, was the next best thing to a goddess. Before the season was over the duke had proposed, had been graciously accepted by the young lady, who felt an inward glow of pride at having done so much better than the family beauty.

"Can I ever forget how that girl Jane

has snubbed me?" said Lady Sophia to her favourite brother. "And to think that I shall be sitting in ermine robes in the House of Lords, while she is peeping through that nasty iron fretwork to catch a glimpse of the top of her husband's head in the House of Commons."

This splendid engagement of Lady Sophia's turned the tide for the faithful John Vawdrey. Lady Jane met her rejected lover at Trouville, and was so gracious to him, that he ventured to renew his suit, and, to his delighted surprise, was accepted. Anything was better than standing out in the cold, while the ducal engagement was absorbing everybody's thoughts and conversation. Lady Sophia had boasted, in that playful way of hers, of having her beauty-sister for chief bridesmaid, and the beauty-sister had made up her mind that this thing should not be. Perhaps she would have married a worse man than John Vawdrey to escape such infamy.

And John Vawdrey was by no means disagreeable to her; nay, it had been pride, and not any disinclination for the man himself, that had bidden her reject him. He was clever, distinguished, and he loved her with a romantic devotion which flattered and pleased her. Yes, she would marry John Vawdrey.

Everybody was delighted at this concession, the lady's parents and belongings most especially so. Here were two daughters disposed of; and if the beauty had made the inferior match, it was only one of those caprices of fortune that are more to be expected than the common order of things.

So there was a double marriage the following spring at St. George's, and Lady Jane's childish desire was gratified. There were two bishops at the ceremony. True that one was only colonial, and hardly ranked higher than the nursery hearth-brush.

Fate was not altogether unkind to Lady Jane. Her humble marriage was much happier than her sister's loftier union. The duke, who had been so good-natured as a lover, proved stupid and somewhat tiresome as a husband. He gave his mind to hunting and farming, and cared for nothing else. Sophia, Duchess of Dovedale, had seven country seats, and no home. Her children were puny and feeble. They sickened in the feudal Scotch castle, they languished in the Buckinghamshire Eden—a white freestone palace set among the woods that overhang the valley of the

Thames. No breezes that blow could waft strength or vitality to those feeble lungs. At thirty, the Duchess of Dovedale had lost all her babies, save one frail sapling, a girl of two years old, who promised to have a somewhat better constitution than her perished brothers and sisters. On this small paragon the duchess concentrated her cares and hopes. She gave up hunting—much to the disgust of that Nimrod, her husband—in order to superintend her nursery. From the most pleasure-loving of matrons, she became the most domestic. Lady Mabel Ashbourne was to grow up the perfection of health, wisdom, and beauty, under the mother's loving care. She would have a great fortune, for there was a considerable portion of the duke's property which he was free to bequeath to his daughter. He had coal pits in the north and a tin mine in the west. He had a house at Kensington which he had built for himself, a model Queen Anne mansion, with every article of furniture made on the strictest æsthetic principles, and not an anachronism from the garrets to the cellars. The Scottish castle and the Buckinghamshire Paradise would go with the title; but the duke, delighted with the easy-going sport of the New Forest, had bought six hundred acres between Stony Cross and Romsey, and had made for himself an archetypal home-farm, and had built himself a hunting-box, with stables and kennels of the most perfect kind; and this estate, with the Queen Anne house, and the pits and the mine, was his very own to dispose of as he pleased.

Lady Jane's marriage had proved happy. Her husband, always egged on by her ambitious promptings, had made himself an important figure in the senate, and had been on the eve of entering the Cabinet, when death cut short his career. A hard winter and a sharp attack of bronchitis nipped the aspiring senator in the bud.

Lady Jane was as nearly broken-hearted as so cold a woman could be. She had loved her husband better than anything in this life, except herself. He left her with one son and a handsome jointure, with the full possession of Briarwood until her son's majority. Upon that only child Lady Jane lavished all her care, but did not squander the wealth of her affection. Perhaps her capacity for loving had died with her husband. She had been proud and fond of him, but she was not proud of the little boy in velvet knickerbockers, whose good looks were his only merit, and who was con-

tinually being guilty of some new piece of mischief; laming ponies, smashing orchids, glass, china, and generally disturbing the perfect order which was Briarwood's first law.

When the boy was old enough to go to Eton, he seemed still more remote from his mother's love and sympathy. He was passionately fond of field sports, and those Lady Jane Vawdrey detested. He was backward in all his studies, despite the careful coaching he had received from the mild Anglican curate of Briarwood village. He was intensely pugilistic, and rarely came home for the holidays without bringing a black eye or a swollen nose as the result of his latest fight. He spent a good deal of money, and in a manner that to his mother's calm sense appeared simply idiotic. His hands were always grubby, his nails wore almost perpetual mourning, his boots were an outrage upon good taste, and he always left a track of muddy foot-marks behind him along the crimson-carpeted corridors. What could any mother do for such a boy, except tolerate him? Love was out of the question. How could a delicate, high-bred woman, soft-handed, velvet-robed, care to have such a lad about her? A boy who smelt of stables and wore hob-nailed boots; whose pockets were always sticky with toffee; whose handkerchiefs were a disgrace to humanity; who gave his profoundest thoughts to pigeon-fancying, and his warmest affections to ratting terriers.

But while all these habits made the lad abominable in the eyes of his mother, the Duke and Duchess of Dovedale admired the young Hercules with a fond and envious admiration. The duke would have given coal pits and tin mines, all the disposable property he held, and deemed it but a small price for such a son. The duchess thought of her feeble boy-babies who had been whooping-coughed or scarlet-fevered out of the world, and sighed, and loved her nephew better than ever his mother had loved him since his babyhood. When the Dovedales were at their place in the forest, Roderick almost lived with them; or, at any rate, divided his time between Ashbourne Park and the Abbey House, and spent as little of his life at home as he could. He patronised Lady Mabel, who was his junior by five years, rode her thoroughbred pony for her, under the pretence of improving its manners, until he took a header with it into a bog, out of which pony and boy rolled and struggled

indiscriminately, boy none the worse, pony lamed for life. He played billiards with the duke, and told the duchess all his school adventures, practical jokes, fights, apple-pie beds, surreptitious fried sausages, and other misdemeanours.

Out of this friendship arose a brilliant vision which reconciled Lady Jane Vawdrey to her son's preference for his aunt's house and his aunt's society. Why should he not marry Mabel by-and-by, and unite the two estates of Ashbourne and Briarwood, and become owner of the pits and the mines, and distinguish himself in the senate, and be created a peer? As the husband of Lady Mabel Ashbourne, he would be rich enough to command a peerage, almost as a right, but his mother would have had him deserve it. With this idea Lady Jane urged on her son's education. All his Hampshire friends called him clever, but he won no laurels at school. Lady Jane sent for grinders and had the boy ground; but all the grinding could not grind a love of classics or metaphysics into this free son of the forest. He went to Oxford, and got himself ploughed for his Little Go, with a wonderful facility. For politics he cared not a jot, but he could drive tandem better than any other undergraduate of his year. He never spoke at the Union, but he rowed stroke in the University boat. He was famous for his biceps, his good-nature, and his good looks; but so far he had distinguished himself for nothing else, and to this stage of non-performance had he come when the reader first beheld him.

It was only half-past nine when the brougham drove up to the pillared porch at Briarwood. The lighted drawing-room windows shone out upon the autumn dark—a row of five tall French casements—and the sound of a piano caught Roderick's ear, as he tossed the end of his cigar into the shrubbery and mounted the wide stone door-steps.

"At it again," muttered Rorie with a shrug of disgust, as he entered the hall, and heard, through the half-open drawing-room door, an interlacement of pearly runs—for, at this stage of his existence, Rorie had no appreciation of brilliant pianoforte playing. The music he liked best was of the simplest, most inartificial order.

"Are the duke and duchess here?" he asked the butler.

"Her grace and Lady Mabel is here, sir; not the dook."

"I suppose I must dress before I face

the quality," muttered Rorie sulkily, and he went leaping upstairs—three steps at a time—to exchange his brown shooting clothes and leather gaiters for that dress suit of his which was continually getting too small for him. Rorie detested himself in a dress suit and a white tie.

"You beast," he cried, addressing his reflection in the tall glass door of his armoire, "you are the image of a waiter at the Clarendon."

The Briarwood drawing-room looked a great deal too vast and too lofty for the three delicately-made women who were occupying it this evening. It was a finely-proportioned room, and its amber satin hangings made a pleasing background for the white-and-gold furniture. White, gold, and amber made up the prevailing tone of colour. Clusters of wax lights against the walls, and a crystal chandelier with many candles filled the room with a soft radiance. It was a room without shadow. There were no recesses, no deep-set windows or doors. All was coldly bright, faultlessly elegant. Rorie detested his mother's drawing-room almost as much as he detested himself in a dress coat that was too short in the sleeves.

The matrons were seated on each side of the shining gold-and-steel fireplace, before which there stretched an island of silky white fur. Lady Jane Vawdrey's younger sister was a stout, comfortable-looking woman in grey silk, who hardly realised one's preconceived notion of a duchess. Lady Jane herself had dignity enough for the highest rank in the Almanach de Gotha. She wore dark-green velvet and old rose-point, and looked like a portrait by Velasquez. Years had not impaired the purity of her blonde complexion. Her aquiline nose, thin lips, small, firm chin, were the features of one born to rule. Her light brown hair showed no streak of grey. An admirable woman, no doubt, for anybody else's mother, as Rorie so often said to himself.

The young lady was still sitting at the piano, remote from the two elders, her slim white fingers running in and out and to and fro in those wondrous intricacies and involutions which distinguish modern classical music. Rorie hated all that running about the piano to no purpose, and could not perceive his cousin's merit in having devoted three or four hours of her life daily for the last seven years to the accomplishment of this harmonious meandering. She left off playing, and held out her small white hand to him as he came

to the piano, after shaking hands with his aunt.

What was she like, this paragon formed by a mother's worshipping love and ceaseless care, this one last pearl in the crown of domestic life, this child of so many prayers, and hopes, and fears, and deep pathetic rejoicings?

She was very fair to look upon—complete and beautiful as a pearl—with that outward purity, that perfect delicacy of tint and harmony of detail which is in itself a charm. Study her as captiously as you would, you could find no flaw in this jewel. The small regular features were so delicately chiselled, the fair, fine skin was so transparent, the fragile figure so exquisitely moulded, the ivory hand and arm so perfect—no, you could discover no bad drawing or crude colouring in this human picture. She lifted her clear blue eyes to Rorie's face, and smiled at him in gentle welcome; and though he felt intensely cross at having been summoned home like a school-boy, he could not refuse her a responsive smile, or a gentle pressure of the taper fingers.

"And so you have been dining with those horrid people!" she exclaimed with an air of playful reproach, "and on your last night in Hampshire—quite too unkind to Aunt Jane."

"I don't know whom you mean by horrid people, Mabel," answered Rorie, chilled back into sulkiness all at once; "the people I was with are all that is good and pleasant."

"Then you've not been at the Tempests', after all?"

"I have been at the Tempests'. What have you to say against the Tempests?"

"Oh, I have nothing to say against them," said Lady Mabel, shrugging her pretty shoulders in her fawn-coloured silk gown. "There are some things that do not require saying."

"Mr. Tempest is the best and kindest of men; his wife is—well, a nonentity, perhaps, but not a disagreeable one; and his daughter—"

Here Rorie came to a sudden stop, which Lady Mabel accentuated with a silvery little laugh.

"His daughter is charming," she cried when she had done laughing; "red hair, and a green habit with brass buttons, a yellow waistcoat like her papa's, and a rose in her button-hole. How I should like to see her in Rotten Row!"

"I'll warrant there wouldn't be a better

horsewoman or a prettier girl there, let you see her when you may," cried Rorie, scarlet with indignation.

His mother looked daggers. His cousin gave another silvery laugh, clear as those pearly treble runs upon the Erard; but that pretty artificial laugh had a ring which betrayed her mortification.

"Rorie is thorough," she said; "when he likes people, he thinks them perfection. You do think that little red-haired girl quite perfection, now don't you, Rorie?" pursued Lady Mabel, sitting down before the piano again, and touching the notes silently as she seemed to admire the slender diamond hoops upon her white fingers—old-fashioned rings that had belonged to a patrician great-grandmother. "You think her quite a model young lady, though they say she can hardly read, and makes her mark—like William the Conqueror—instead of signing her name, and spends her life in the stables, and occasionally, when the fox gets back to earth—swears."

"I don't know who they may be," cried Roderick savagely, "but they say a pack of lies. Violet Tempest is as well-educated as—any girl need be. All girls can't be paragons, or, if they could, this earth would be intolerable for the rest of humanity. Lord deliver us from a world overrun with paragons. Violet Tempest is little more than a child, a spoiled child, if you like, but she has a heart of gold, and a firmer grip on her saddle than any other woman in Hampshire."

Roderick had turned from scarlet to pale by the time he finished this speech. His mother had paled at the first mention of poor Vixen. That young lady's name acted upon Lady Jane's feelings very much as a red rag acts on a bull.

"I think after keeping you away from your mother on the last night of your vacation, Mr. Tempest might at least have had the good taste to let you come home sober," said Lady Jane with suppressed rage.

"I drank a couple of glasses of still hock at dinner, and not a drop of anything else from the time I entered the Abbey House till I left it; and I don't think, considering how I've seasoned myself with Bass at Oxford, that two glasses of Rudesheimer would floor me," explained Rorie, with recovered calmness.

"Oh, but you were drinking deep of a more intoxicating nectar," cried Lady Mabel with that provokingly distinct utterance of hers. She had been taught to

speak as carefully as girls of inferior rank are taught to play Beethoven—every syllable studied, every tone trained and ripened to the right quality. "You were with Violet Tempest."

"How you children quarrel!" exclaimed the duchess; "you could hardly be worse if you were lovers. Come here, Rorie, and tell me all that has happened to you since we saw you at Lord's in July. Never mind these Tempest people. They are of the smallest possible importance. Of course, Rorie must have somebody to amuse himself with while we are away."

"And now we are come back, he is off to Oxford," said Mabel with an aggrieved air.

"You shouldn't have stayed so long in Switzerland then," retorted Rorie.

"Oh, but it was my first visit, and everything is so lovely. After all the Swiss landscapes I have done in chalk, and pencil, and water-colours, I was astonished to find what a stranger I was to the scenery. I blushed when I remembered those dreadful landscapes of mine. I was ashamed to look at Mont Blanc. I felt as if the Matterhorn would fall and crush me."

"I think I shall do Switzerland next long," said Rorie patronisingly, as if it would be a good thing for Switzerland.

"You might have come this year while we were there," said Lady Mabel.

"No, I mightn't. I've been grinding. If you knew what a dose of Aristotle I've had, you'd pity me. That's where you girls have the best of it. You learn two or three modern languages, to meander up and down the piano, and spoil Bristol board, or Whatman's hot-pressed imperial, and then you call yourselves educated; while we have to go back to the beginning of civilisation, and find out what a lot of old Greek duffers were driving at when they sat in the sunshine and prosed like old boots."

Lady Mabel looked at him with a serene smile.

"Would you be surprised to hear that I know a little Greek," she said, "just enough to struggle through the Socratic dialogues with the aid of my master?"

Roderick started as if he had been stung.

"What a shame!" he cried. "Aunt Sophia, what do you mean by making a Lady Jane Grey of her?"

"A woman who has to occupy a leading position can hardly know too much," answered the duchess sententiously.

"Ah, to be sure, Mabel will marry some diplomatic swell, and be entertaining ambassadors by-and-by. And when some modern Greek envoy comes simpering up to her with a remark about the weather, it will be an advantage to know Plato. I understand. Wheels within wheels."

"The Duchess of Dovedale's carriage," announced the butler, rolling out the syllables as if it were a personal gratification to pronounce them.

Mabel rose at once from the piano, and came to say good-night to her aunt.

"My dear child, it's quite early," said Lady Jane; "Roderick's last night, too. And your mamma is in no hurry."

Mabel looked at Roderick, but that young gentleman was airing himself on the hearth-rug, and looking absently up at the ceiling. It evidently signified very little to him whether his aunt and cousin went or stayed.

"You know you told papa you would be home quite early," said Lady Mabel, and the duchess rose immediately.

She had a way of yielding to her only daughter which her stronger-minded sister highly disapproved of. The first duty of a mother, in Lady Jane's opinion, was to rule her child, the second, to love it. The idea was no doubt correct in the abstract, but the practice was not succeeding too well with Roderick.

"Good-night, and good-bye," said Lady Mabel, when the maid had brought her wraps and Rorie had put them on.

"Not good-bye," said the good-natured duchess; "Rorie must come to breakfast to-morrow, and see the duke. He was too tired to come out to-night, but I know he wants to see you."

"Thanks. I'll be there," answered Rorie, and he escorted the ladies to their carriage, but not another word did Mabel speak till the brougham had driven away from Briarwood.

"What a horrid young man Roderick has grown, mamma," she remarked decisively.

"My love, I never saw him look handsomer."

"I don't mean his looks. Good looks in a man are a superfluity. But his manners—I never saw anything so underbred. Those Tempest people are spoiling him."

"Roderick," said Lady Jane, just as Rorie was contemplating an escape to the billiard-room and his cigar, "I want a little serious talk with you."

Rorie shivered in his shoes. He knew too well what his mother's serious talk meant. He shrugged his shoulders with a movement that indicated a dormant resistance, and went quietly into the drawing-room.

WITH AN IRISH AGENT.

IN one of the southern counties of England, two hours' distance from the metropolis, there is an elevated plateau which commands a view of twenty miles on every side. The prospect is one of singular wealth and fertility. Woods and hedgerows, pastures, corn-fields, and hop-gardens cover the undulating expanse as far as the long blue ridge of the Downs, which enclose the scene almost in a semicircle, having the sea for its chord. Within this territory a royal prince, two dukes, two earls, two barons, a cabinet minister, a privy councillor, an ex-lord mayor, Indian soldiers and civilians, commercial millionaires, and a crowd of lesser celebrities from the world of trade have made their homes. There are also the halls of country squires, large rectories and vicarages, aspiring farmhouses with conservatories and croquet-lawns, and substantial cottages nestling amongst flowers, creepers, and fruit-trees. Ancient ruins, well preserved, are not wanting, nor old battle-fields and historic sites, over which antiquaries wage their harmless disputes.

In this favoured district poverty hardly shows its face; for even the tramps, whose unclean procession constantly perambulates the highway between London and the sea, are a red and sturdy race, and certainly do not gain their livelihood by exciting pity.

I thought of this scene, which is very familiar to me, when I stood on a similar plateau commanding an equally wide prospect in the province of Leinster, fifty miles from Dublin. The summit of the hill was covered with heather, but the country below was fertile and cultivated. The enclosures were small, the hedgerows devoid of trees; in some places there were no fences; in others, only stone walls; the woods were not extensive; but every available piece of ground bore some kind of crop. The mountains closed the prospect on two sides, and through the plains three rivers wound their way, and, meeting towards the southern horizon, flowed together to the sea.

In extent, fertility, careful cultivation,

and natural beauty the Irish and English landscapes were equal; but there the likeness ceased, and a striking contrast commenced.

The whole of the Irish territory belonged to a few landowners, whose mansions—some of which were seldom tenanted—were scattered here and there at wide intervals. Besides these magnates, and in lieu of a varied population, there were the Protestant clergy, the Romish priests, and a few opulent farmers; but the great bulk of the land was in the hands of a peasant tenantry, and the pervading habitation was the little dirty cabin, to which the Irishman clings with a tenderness that baffles reform.

The landscape was interspersed with spots which had been famous in Erin's history; but their names could not be mentioned without awakening the still bitter memories of wrong and bloodshed.

The beggars who traversed the country were real beggars—unfortunates who lived on alms; blind people, dragged along by dogs; diseased and tattered objects, whose rags and misery moved the traveller's compassion.

The portion of the country immediately round the hill, to the extent of thirty thousand acres, nominally belonged to an English infant and his trustees; but in the eyes of the inhabitants these personages were only distant and misty phantoms, as they lived in England, seldom came to the place, and left all power and responsibility in the hands of their agent, my friend Edward Bull, an English gentleman.

Bull lived in the midst of his people; his house, a decent and substantial building, being the principal edifice, except the police-station, in the village of Kilragget, whose long straggling street wound up a gentle incline to the principal gate of the demesne.

This gate, with a lodge to correspond, had been designed in the newest fashion by an English architect, and formed a curious contrast to the surrounding hovels, which, by a singular coincidence, seemed to me to be the dirtiest and meanest in the whole village.

Bull told me that he had received special orders to sweep away these unsightly cabins, in order that the entrance to the castle might present a more respectable appearance; but the tenants clung to their dwellings with such tenacity, that he had as yet been able to get possession of one

only, the door of which I observed he had blocked up with a heap of stones and further secured with an enormous padlock.

Kilragget Castle, or Castle Kilragget, as it was indifferently styled, was not a castellated building, nor picturesque from decay or neglect; but merely a comfortable and commodious modern structure, standing, according to Irish custom, in a large demesne, which was surrounded by a wall three miles in length, and contained within its bounds a park, a farm, coverts, gardens, a stream and a lake with swans and trout, lawns, shrubberies, and plantations, a ruined castle, and a long avenue of lime trees, which was said to be haunted by an apparition, and was thence called the Ghost's Walk.

Certain signs about the place, old names still clinging to rooms and walks and gardens, showed that in years gone by it had been the home of a numerous family; but they were all scattered or dead, and the house was now occupied only once a year—in sad October, when the woods were turning yellow.

Then, indeed, lawns were mown, paths and shrubberies trimmed, fences repaired, the gardens looked gay and neat, all the peasantry smiled and wore their best clothes; there were horses in the stables, and guests in the hall; the coverts rang with the noise of dogs and guns and beaters; the village was all astir, and a shower of bounty descended on the poor.

But the visit lasted for only one short month, and then a mournful silence succeeded for the rest of the year. The grounds were not absolutely neglected, and the farm was always carefully managed, but the place wore an unkempt and dishevelled appearance; sheep and bullocks intruded everywhere; a solitary old woman reigned in the house, and the Scotch bailiff and the ghost had the demesne almost to themselves.

Ball had the management and control of the entire estate. When I visited him, he had just returned from spending a month in England, and a large arrear of business had accumulated in his absence.

The tenants came to him on all occasions, but Thursday was the day of his grand levee, when everyone could claim an audience. I was amused at the number and variety of the questions which called for his decision.

A crowd of applicants invited him to come and see their premises, with a view to granting some kind of repair, from a

new barn or stable down to a bed, with which necessary article it was the practice to supply the humbler tenants; the sanitary inspector invited his attention to the state of the pigsties at Clogtopher, a remote portion of the estate, nearly twenty miles away; the gamekeeper wished for his presence in the contrary direction to inspect the moors and the new settlers, and to see how the women stole the heather for fuel; one of the clerks had not been sober for a fortnight, and had nearly succeeded in setting fire to his house; Tim Cody, the under-keeper, had given way to whisky worse than ever, had lost all the young pheasants, and thrashed his father; old Toole was dead intestate, his eldest son had sold the stock, and run off to Dublin with the money—what were the younger brothers to do? Pat Morris's trees damaged Miles Moloney's oats, but Pat would not pay Miles the compensation which his honour had awarded; the people at Ballinivat were again all by the ears about the right of way; Flanagan's cow had tumbled into a quarry, and he wished to have a fence and gate put up, and something towards a new cow; Paul O'Flaherty was going to sell his land to a purchaser whom everybody hated; David Keogh asked permission to subdivide his holding of eighteen acres; Daniel O'Rourke would not be ejected from his house though the roof had been removed; Pat Murphy swore publicly at the ale-house that he would be even with the sheriff's officers if they put the law in force against him; Biddy Malone's cousin had pulled Biddy's house down, while she was in the hospital with the jaundice; and so on with a list of wants and grievances which seemed endless.

One of the most pressing applicants was Cormick or Corny Wheelan, who asked for a new roof to his stable, the deplorable condition of which he described with such pathetic eloquence that the next morning we set off to inspect his premises.

Wheelan was tenant of about ninety acres, partly arable, partly meadow. The soil was good, and the fields well and carefully cultivated. His horses, colts, cattle, and pigs were of more than average merit, and he was evidently a well-to-do man who understood his business.

He wore a blue tail-coat, knee-breeches, and a large shirt-collar, which stuck up on each side of his neck almost to his ears. He had a red whiskerless face, whose whole superficies he shaved on Sundays

and saints' days; his eyes were light blue, and his mouth large and flexible.

He talked much, but not foolishly, and though he never laughed, there was a kind of melancholy humour in his remarks. The man, his crops, and stock impressed me favourably, and increased the surprise with which I looked at his buildings. It was the first time that I had ever seen an Irish farmer's homestead.

The house was a small one-storied cottage of rough stone, coated with white plaster; it had four rooms—two bedrooms above, and a kitchen and sitting-room below. This latter was a most comfortless apartment, had only the bare earth for a floor, and contained a few chairs, a table, a cupboard, a bottle of whisky, and a picture of the Pope. The barn and stable were at right angles to the house at each end, so as to form with it three sides of a square, the fourth side being made up of the dung-hill, the duck-pond, and a kind of cavern in which the pigs lived. The whole enclosure was about fifteen yards square, and from his parlour window Corny could survey, smell, and almost touch all his possessions. Neither within the house nor without was there any attempt at ornament; no flowers, no garden, not even an orchard; nothing but the bare necessities of life, while the desolate look of the place was increased by the ruins of a cottage standing hard by, the roof of which had fallen in, leaving a ghastly skeleton of walls and gables.

Wheelan's two daughters, who stood in the doorway, were in keeping with the scene. They were tall, sinewy young women, simply but stoutly clad, with red hair and freckled arms and faces; hard, spare figures, without any softness or feminine undulations.

They seemed so careworn and toilworn, that I was startled when their stiff features relaxed into a grin, and they turned aside to giggle. Perhaps they were not so solemn as they looked. They joined with their father in offering us whisky, and we had great difficulty in making them accept our refusal; but at length, finding we were in earnest, Corny led the way to his stable, without having softened our hearts with the national beverage.

The state of the stable justified Corny's description. He cautioned us against entering it, pointing out that the roof was unsafe and propped up by poles; and he explained the other defects, which were sufficiently obvious without any explana-

tion. Corny's stable was a little pitch-dark hovel, with cracked walls, a roof partly fallen in, and broken rafters protruding through the thatch, which was black and putrid, and covered with a luxuriant crop of oats. It had been in its present condition for two years, Wheelan said, but he had most religiously refrained from repairing it, as if he were proud of having such a complete and unrivalled specimen of a dilapidated building. He seemed highly delighted when the agent very readily promised him slate and timber for a new roof; but we then found that the stable was not his only grievance. His next trouble arose from the proceedings of his neighbour, Paul Molony.

Paul held an adjacent farm of about twenty acres, but being ninety years old, and very feeble, he was no longer able to work, and had agreed to sell his land to a stranger from a distant parish.

Now Corny and his friends considered that the lands of each district (Hibernicé, townland), like the lands of a sept in former times, belonged, in a certain way, to all the inhabitants of the district; and they were therefore highly indignant at Paul for offering his farm to a stranger, instead of to one of his neighbours, many of whom were ready and willing to buy it.

However, before the transaction could be completed the agent's consent was necessary, and Corny persuaded Bull to have an interview with Molony, and enquire into the case; and accordingly we set off for Molony's house, Corny leading the way.

We found Paul in his farmyard, sitting idly on an empty cornrick. Corny introduced us, and explained the purpose of our coming, but the patriarch, after recognising the agent by a nod and an inarticulate grunt, seemed to pay no more attention to what was passing.

He was a gaunt, large-framed man, but all strength had departed from his limbs and all lustre from his eye, and his long blue coat and cape, his black breeches and gaiters, nay even his skin, seemed too large for him, and hung about him in loose folds. His heavy eyes looked steadily but vacantly across the cultivated plain to the distant mountains, and whilst Corny discussed his affairs with great ardour and eloquence, he sat bolt upright in monumental stillness.

Whilst we were talking his daughter appeared at the door of the house—a mere cabin, to which the pig and the fowls had

free admittance—and seeing us with her father, came forward, gathering up her dishevelled hair and twisting it into a knot as she approached. She was a stout girl of twenty-five, rather pretty, but very untidy and dirty, with a ragged gown, bare legs, and large, misshapen shoes.

The agent seeing her, and having ascertained who she was, asked Corny why she did not marry one of the neighbours, and the farm could then go with her as a dowry, to the satisfaction of all parties.

“Shure, your honour, there’s no plazin’ her,” said Corny, in a louder tone than usual, at the same time casting an angry and reproachful glance at this fastidious slut. Mary, who probably had no intention of marrying to suit Corny’s plans, made no answer to his remarks, but raising her hand to shield her eyes from the sunlight, peered from under it first at Corny and then at the agent, as if she did not understand their language, but hoped to gather their meaning from the expression of their countenances. All the while her features were distended in a broad and even grin, which was never increased and never relaxed.

When we left her father and went to inspect the fields, she followed closely at our heels, grinning continually but saying nothing, having her eyes constantly fixed on Bull, as if she was not going to be imposed upon by his rosy and genial appearance, but was determined to watch him closely, lest he should walk off with some of her father’s property.

Two or three of the neighbours, hearing what was going on, now joined us, and backed up Corny’s arguments with great vigour, so that when at last Bull decided that the farm should not go to a stranger there was great joy, and Corny shouted to one of his friends:

“D’ye hear that, Tim Doolan?”

“I do,” said Tim.

“Ye’re a witness to that, Tim Doolan?”

“I am,” said Tim, with the air of a man who knew what he was saying, and was prepared “to go on the table” and stick to his statement.

They all seemed very well satisfied, but I know not what Mary and her father thought of the matter, for during the whole colloquy neither of them had opened their lips.

The next day we started early for Clogtopher, to inspect the pigsties of which the inspector had complained.

Clogtopher, a small town near the foot

of a mountain, was an outlying portion of the estate, some eighteen miles away. The population consisted of red-hot Papists and Fenians. They had lately wrecked the house of a poor priest who dared to dispute the authority of his ecclesiastical superiors. For their gallantry on this occasion the Pope had presented them with medals; though the Government, taking a different view of the transaction, punished them as rioters. In the neighbouring mountain a band of defeated Fenians had taken refuge, and, according to popular report, perished of cold and starvation. The coffee-room of the inn at which we stopped was adorned with prints of Daniel O’Connell in cloak and broad brim, Robert Emmet in tights and hessians, the old Irish Parliament, with Curran haranguing, and a group of Irish patriots whose names were not familiar to me, and whose faces—probably through the fault of the painter—did not inspire me with any desire to make their acquaintance. The newspapers which lay upon the table were of the most inflammatory kind, friendly to France, enthusiastic for the Pope, and bitter against English perfidy; yet, with all their extravagance, ably and eloquently written, and admirably fitted to keep the bewildered peasantry in a state of exasperation. It was a common saying that in this neighbourhood an assassin could be hired for the small sum of half-a-crown.

The day of our visit was the feast of St. Peter, and the people having just returned from mass were lounging in their best clothes at the corners of the streets, enjoying the privilege of keeping their hands idly in their pockets, and directing looks of sullen curiosity towards Bull, who walked about with complete sang-froid, quite undisturbed by the reflection that his large frame offered a very easy mark to a charge of slugs.

All, however, to whom he spoke were outwardly civil, and with one exception, to be mentioned hereafter, seemed glad to see him. The pigsties and back-yards fully justified the complaints of the inspector. They were at the rear of a row of houses, a dozen of them, each three yards square, and each containing a pigstye, a pig, a manure-heap, and a pool of stagnant water. The owners generally were mildly astonished that anyone should find fault with their arrangements, but promised to carry out Bull’s directions as to the removal or abatement of the nuisance.

Only in one instance did there seem likely to be any opposition.

We were standing in the dirtiest of these little compartments when there suddenly appeared from the house one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen. She seemed about eighty years of age, but was still tall and erect. She had just returned from mass, and her dress was scrupulously clean and neat. She was enveloped in one of those large cloaks of black serge which for more than a thousand years have been the dress of Irish women. The ample hood of this garment hung in loose folds over her head, just disclosing a very white cap, tied under the chin in a large bow. A shawl of an eastern pattern was crossed over her bosom, and her dark brown petticoat was short enough to show her thin ankles and finely-shaped feet, black stockings, and small shoes neatly tied with black ribbon. At the sight of two strangers prowling about her premises she drew herself up to her full height. One long slender hand clasped her rosary almost convulsively, and with the other she threw back her hood, so as to show her features more distinctly. Her face was a long oval, and though the skin was carved with wrinkles, the complexion was singularly white and pure. Her straight nose, thin lips, and chiselled chin gave her a highbred air, and her whole appearance was strangely out of harmony with the surrounding scene. Amongst the English poor I have often seen venerable women, but never one so refined and dignified as this old Celtic dame. Her eyes were dim with age, and she stood for some time peering at us with a look of surprise and indignation. Her nostrils were dilated, her face full of anger, and I hoped she would speak; but to my disappointment, after a long scrutiny, she dropped her hood again, turned away, and, as if we were beneath her notice, began to caress the pig.

Two days afterwards Bull set off to investigate the case of David Keogh, who wished to sell two acres of his holding.

We drove through the village, and ascended a long hill by a road that led westward up to some extensive larch and pine groves, which bounded the view in that direction. Having passed through these, we found ourselves on a wide plateau, and though Kilragget was not a lively place, we seemed to have bid farewell to society and civilisation when we lost sight of its church and straggling

street, for the country now before us was very thinly inhabited and drearily uniform in appearance. The landscape stretched away to the horizon in a succession of gentle undulations, whose surface was seldom broken by a tree. The whole expanse was divided into small rectangular fields, sometimes separated by stone walls, and varying in colour from light yellow to dark green, according to the crops. There was no spot uncultivated, except the brown patches whence the peasants had dug peat, and a margin of rushy swamp on either side of the rivulets in the valleys. There was neither church nor chapel to be seen, nor any building larger than a common cabin, and I was surprised when we suddenly came upon a school of bright-eyed children, under the care of a neat schoolmistress.

We had to penetrate a long way into the region before we found Keogh's cottage. When we discovered it he was not at home, but his daughter, a ragged, bare-legged girl of thirteen, ran off like a deer to fetch him from the bog where he was cutting peat.

She soon returned with him, and he took us to inspect the fields which he wished to sell; but we did not go alone.

The presence of the agent in that remote place was a rare event, and the news of his arrival spread like wildfire. Figures seemed to start out of the ground, and make their way towards us across fields and over walls. We were soon followed by a long and excited tail of ragged men and women, talking and arguing, conspicuous amongst whom was a very tall dark man, who was the intending purchaser, and an old man in a tail-coat and knee-breeches, who seemed to be in an unaccountably bad temper.

Many of them had their own private grievances, but the main cause of excitement was Keogh's proposed sale with which they were all dissatisfied for the following reasons: Keogh proposed to sell his fields to the dark man, whose land did not anywhere adjoin Keogh's farm.

The old gentleman in breeches was the adjoining owner, and, therefore, considered that if the land were sold to anybody it should be sold to him, and had worked himself into a great passion. The rest had land nearer to Keogh's farm than the tall man, and, therefore, they also held that they had prior rights of purchase.

Bull paid no attention to the hubbub, but unfolding a large map of the estate,

carefully examined the position of the fields which Keogh wished to sell, relatively to the tall man's land and that of the other adjoining tenants, and briefly gave his decision:

"To allow the fields to be sold to the tall man would be to create a new and isolated tenancy of two acres. Such tenancies were injurious to the estate, and he had always set his face against them. He should not allow the land to be sold to the tall man. He was not sure that he should allow these two acres to be sold to anybody. Keogh might sell his whole farm if he wished."

This decision did not satisfy anybody; the tall man was furious as a lion robbed of its prey; all the arguments began again, mixed with threats and mutterings about poor men and tyrants. Poor Keogh seemed bewildered. He had relied on this purchase-money to stave off utter destitution. He was a farmer, and held eighteen acres of land, which for Ireland is not a very small farm. But the soil was poor and ungrateful, yielded little, and demanded much, and with all his efforts Keogh could not keep down the weeds and rushes, or supply himself and his family with the necessities of life. His house was a common cabin with two compartments, an earthen floor full of holes, and for furniture a bed, two stools, a table, and a few plates, pots, and pans. He had had nine children. Six were still living, and four of them now stood by his side with his wife, who carried a child in her arms, and was evidently soon again to become a mother. They formed a pitiable group. The mother and children were clad in scanty rags, and had in their faces the yellow tint of starvation. Keogh himself was a slight, ineffectual-looking, sandy man of thirty-five, thin and weak-kneed, dressed in a threadbare suit of blue serge, and a shapeless straw hat which half concealed his features. As we turned away, he watched us with a haggard look of disappointment, his hands dropping by his side, and his mouth half open.

Bull, having delivered his judgment, said no more, but carefully folded up his map, tucked it under his arm, and walked off in the direction of the place where he had left his jaunting-car.

I thought his decision harsh, but he told me that there would be incredible confusion if the tenants were allowed to subdivide their holdings as they pleased, and he was obliged to put his veto on the practice. Moreover, he said that Keogh

had much better sell his farm outright, for this sale of two acres was a mere temporary halt in the downward path to absolute want.

A week afterwards Bull had to undertake a more anxious task, for the day had come when the utmost rigour of the law was to be enforced against Patrick Murphy. Murphy held a very good farm of seventy acres, of which his family had been tenants for successive generations. Presuming on this old connection he had become very lax and drunken, had paid no rent for ten years, had ruined the land by bad farming, refused to depart, though offered nearly the value of the fee simple if only he would go; and when in liquor, used extravagant language as to the feats he would perform if any attempt were made to evict him.

Bull's patience at length gave way, judgment in ejectment was obtained, and the writ of execution placed in the hands of the sheriff.

At ten A.M. the under-sheriff appeared in Kilragget with a formidable company, which he marshalled in front of Bull's door; and having partaken of refreshment, they started on their expedition in the following order: First walked six of the constabulary—tall, athletic men in green uniform, with carbines, bayonets, and cartridges—then came four of the sheriff's officers, followed by two carpenters, the under-sheriff, the agent, the sub-agent, and the attorney. A cab, provided for any peculiar emergency, brought up the rear, and, looking like a piece of artillery or an ambulance, gave an appearance of completeness to the force.

All was ominously still when they came in sight of Murphy's house. Not a living creature was to be seen except a cock and a few hens, and the invaders marched unmolested up to the very door, when Murphy suddenly appeared on the threshold. He had been watching them from the window, and whatever may have been his previous determination, his courage altogether evaporated at the sight of a number of armed men marching steadily towards his dwelling, backed up by a vehicle of novel appearance and unknown meaning.

Bland surprise and injured innocence were written in his visage as he surveyed the party, and asked them what they wanted. On being informed, he addressed the agent in accents of mild reproach. He was on the point of going; he was

ready to deliver up possession that instant. Did his honour think that he would resist? Shure it was absurd. What was the use of all this trouble? His honour paid very little attention to Murphy, but was glad to find that he should get through the job so easily, and gave orders to his men to remove everything from the premises as quickly as possible. Murphy made no opposition, and as the things were taken out, placed them in two carts which he got ready for the purpose.

The furniture had been removed from the lower part of the house, and the men were commencing operations in the two upper rooms, when one of the constabulary came up to Bull, who was standing in the yard, and said that in one of the bedrooms they had found an old woman in bed, and that, as she had refused to stir, and had no clothes on, they were at a loss how to proceed. Here was an unpleasant interruption to the even course of business.

One after another the whole party tried their eloquence on this intractable crone, who was Murphy's mother, but no one could induce her to move or dress herself. She was very old, and brown and wrinkled as a walnut; but her eyes gleamed like hot coals, and she retained the full powers of her voice. She sat up in her bed with her chin resting on her knees, received everybody, especially the attorney, with a volley of abuse and execration, and denounced the cowardice of her son in giving up his house so tamely.

An hour had been spent in fruitless endeavours to overcome her resolution, when the party drew off to consult as to what should be done. Whilst they were thus occupied one of the carpenters, who had remained in the bedroom, came down and announced that the old woman had put on one stocking. This intelligence was hailed with great satisfaction, not so much on account of its intrinsic importance, as because it showed that Mrs. Murphy was yielding. Her toilette, however, took an amazing time, and was often interrupted by long pauses, during which she lay upon the bed groaning deeply. At length she was dressed, and allowed herself to be carried downstairs and placed in the cab.

The attorney slammed the door of the vehicle.

"Where will I drive to?" said the cabman.

"Anywhere ye like," said the attorney.

The cabman drove to the lunatic asylum,

and being refused admittance, drove to the workhouse, and being again refused admittance, finally took the old lady to a lodging in the neighbouring town.

Murphy and his mother enjoyed the glory that belongs to the supposed victims of injustice, but in reality they had never in their lives been so well off. The old dame lived very comfortably on a liberal pension allowed to her by her former landlords, and from the same hands Murphy received a handsome sum of money, ten times as much as he could legally claim, with which he emigrated to America.

Though neither of them had said anything about returning to their dwelling, Bull lost no time in levelling the farmhouse and buildings with the ground; and before a week had passed a young plantation was waving its tender foliage over the ground once occupied by the home of the Murphys.

LONG AGO.

THE bark sails slowly over sunless seas,
The coasts of youth long faded out of sight;
The gleam that lingered on the last dear height,
Lost, as we drift before Life's steady breeze;
Yet, as the ship glides onward, fair green leas,
And wood-crowned uplands, bathed in mystic light,
Show on an isle, set in the moonbeams white,
Or blush of sunrise. Glad, we steer for these;
The mirage pales, the mists close thick again,
We see the great grey waves, and nothing more;
And listen, with a yearning useless pain,
To hear the soft waves whisper on the shore;
Shore of the happy land we used to know,
Ne'er trodden twice in life, the Long Ago.

PERSONALLY CONDUCTED.

x.

WE have not had many views superior, or indeed equal, to this, which breaks upon us as we draw near the summit of the pass. There is no very great breadth of view, the picture being shut in and, as it were, framed on either side by the rugged mountain-tops, which here draw close together, whilst over our heads towers the dark mass of the Tête Noire itself. But along the deep narrow valley the view stretches away, till the tall white mountain-tops grow dim and shadowy at the very farthest limits of the Bernese Oberland. Under ordinary circumstances, one might be almost excused for sentimentalising a little over it. Ours, however, are not ordinary circumstances, and the less we think about sentimentalising or romanticising the better. As we throw ourselves for a moment on the ground under a welcome bit of shade, and pant and fan our-

selves as we revel in the exquisite view and drink in the light fresh breeze, there comes down from the top of the pass, now not more than a few hundred yards off, a wild yell of "Hooray! 'Ere y'are, miss! Walk up! Walk up! Just a-going to begin!"

And there against the clear blue sky on the other side the pass, stands a tall wooden cross dominating the ascent from either side. And around its foot is a group of our mounted contingent, cheering vigorously as a grotesque little figure in a complete suit of check "dittoes" shines his way up, and waves his hat with a shrill cheer as he perches triumphantly upon the cross-bar. Which thereupon suddenly gives way, and Checksuit, picking himself up again with a somewhat rueful grin, limps off, rubbing tender places vigorously.

There is no Douane here now as there was in the old Savoyard times. The new proprietors of what is now the "Département du Mont Blanc" wish, above all things, to make themselves agreeable to their new neighbours, and the old customs line has been removed. But taxes are levied, nevertheless, and pretty heavy taxes, too, though upon very different imports. You will find a healthy appetite, for instance—such an appetite as is exceedingly likely to be developed by a four or five hours' climb in mountain air—a highly dutiable commodity. And as for thirst! Well, I used to think it bad enough to pay at the rate of fivepence a quart for our little spoonful of milk for breakfast and tea. I am thirsty now—indeed, so thirsty that Mr. Neville's suggestion of a little milk has a quite nectarian sound. And fivepence is precisely the sum demanded for a tiny cupful, holding perhaps about half a quarter of a pint!

However, it isn't here we are to lunch. We only sit and cool ourselves a little till the carriages catch us up, and poor Mrs. Crumpelhorne, roasted like an apple, and parched with heat and dust, is comforted with a delicious little basket of wild strawberries that only cost a couple of francs!

A good many of us follow her example, so far, at least, as to consume a considerable proportion of the not gigantic plateful of little bitter-sweet berries before even asking their price. They don't follow quite so closely the philosophy with which, when she does make that awkward enquiry, she smilingly observes, as she pockets the change of her five-franc piece: "Well, my dears, I don't think they could

have cost much more if I'd grown them myself!" As for the gentleman from Manchester, who learns only at the last moment the price of the bottle of beer he has ordered, he simply refuses to take it even after it is poured out, and refreshing himself instead with a vigorous denunciation of Swiss tavern-keepers and all their works, rides heroically off, dry but undefrauded.

Then we all get back into our respective carriages again, and the horses flounder and scramble down the steep road, and the heavy cloud of dust shuts out the form of the irate propriétaire, whose eloquence still follows us long after he and his establishment have disappeared from view. And by-and-by we come to a tiny village with the blackened remains of the recently burned hotel on one side the narrow street, and a row of small cottages and open sheds at the other, and the whole roadway between, for a hundred yards or more, blocked tightly with a solid mass of carriages, the horses belonging to which stand in long rows under the little sheds, with just about a foot's distance between their heels and the sides of the blockading vehicles. It is with no little difficulty that we make good our passage among these doubtful-looking heels and find our way scathless to the crowded little chalet, packed close with hungry travellers, two to every chair, to the farthest corner of the balcony and the bottom inch of the outside flight of stone steps, which for this season at all events must do duty for an hotel. How we all get served with even the semblance of a meal is a mystery. The dishes do not reach us in any very conventional order of precedence, nor does the sauce, with which a plateful of meat is garnished at starting, invariably arrive at the same time or the same destination as the meat itself. We who are on the outer edge of the throng hardly know whether we ought to be more thankful to get the one or to escape the other, which, for the most part, spreads itself gradually, as it comes along, over the garments of the intervening guests. The citizen with the goatee, however, is in his glory. It reminds him, he says, of the Pacific steamers in the old days of the diggin's, and with the prompt decision of an old campaigner he pounces forthwith upon a roll and a dainty dish of chamois, and makes a "squar meal" off that without the superfluous intervention of a plate. It has vanished before the unchamoised

guests on his other hand have time for so much as a remonstrance; and the next moment the citizen has vanished too, and is smoking a digestive cigar outside with the air of a man who is master of the situation.

In the course of time we too arrive, though by more circuitous methods, at the same desirable result, and the next hour or two is spent in lounging upon the shady bank at the other side of the burnt hotel, dreamily awaiting the call to resume our journey. When it comes, we are at first a little puzzled to find that mules and carriages have all alike vanished, and that the road, blocked as closely as ever, is now blocked with an entirely strange set. It is to Checksuit that we are indebted for a solution of the enigma, his loud demands for his departed "moke" soon bringing out our shepherd, who has just found a moment, poor man, to gulp a hasty cutlet on his own account, and who explains that the difficulty of the "middle passage" is got over here by the simple process of an exchange of carriages. It is the arrivals from Chamounix who are at this moment on their way in our waggons, leaving us theirs in exchange. So, devoutly hoping that no portion of our more personal belongings which, in the shape of cloaks, umbrellas, courier-bags, and, even in more than one case, purses, have been left in our original seats, we scramble into our new places, plunge head-first down the steep rugged road—steeper and rugged by far than on the other side—and pulling up every now and then, at the polite request of our coachee that we will walk down some more than usually perpendicular stretch, find ourselves once more in a long narrow valley, and under the shadow of the "monarch of mountains," the great Mont Blanc.

My first glacier, I must confess, rather disappoints me. I have had visions of a lofty ridge of ice, with peaks, and pinnacles, and deep abysses, stretching its glittering length through a narrow chasm in the dark pine forest, with the flowers blossoming at its feet. So when Mr. Neville, who knows the road and is always on the watch to point out any new feature of interest, levels his white umbrella at a sort of notch in the mountain opposite, where the snow seems to be a little duller in sheen and a little lumpier in form than elsewhere, and murmurs, "Glacier—Argentière," I stare for the moment at him, rather than at it, won-

deringly. Then he points out to me the pale blue tints streaking the white masses here and there, which I have taken to be shadows, but which he now explains to be the bare walls of solid ice, where they are too steep to carry their white robe of snow. And then, by degrees, I trace out the whole form of the great ice-torrent, pouring down from the wide mountain cleft at the rate of so many feet in the year.

Still, grand as it is, I am disappointed. There are no peaks or pinnacles at all. It looks rather as though a perfectly smooth and even sheet of ice had been flung from the cleft over the face of the mountain, and had split and sunk from its own weight. Nor does it seem to reach the valley at all; so the lovely contrasts with the dark firs and the gay flowers are altogether lost. Mr. Neville tells me that this lower portion of the glaciers, many of which, not so many years ago, used to extend right down into the very bottoms of the valleys, is disappearing almost everywhere. The famous Rhone Glacier, he tells me, when he visited it last year, had lost nearly two miles of its length when he knew it first, and had now comparatively little remaining but the almost perpendicular wall of ice of which its upper portion consists, and which seems, from here, at all events, to constitute similarly the chief part of the glacier now before us. He is inclined to fancy that before this process shall have gone on for very many years longer, the lower part of the glacier will become too light to act any longer as a sort of skid to the upper part, which must then come down with a crash into the valley, sweeping everything before it. Which is a view that I am bound to say does add a decided fascination to the aspect of that mighty mass of ice, the vastness of which grows upon you with every moment your eye rests upon it.

This, however, is not by any means the general view among us. The mounted party especially, whom we have now overtaken, and who seem to find the downhill road decidedly more trying than the up, do not seem to regard this new feature of the landscape as worthy so much as a glance. I fancy Checksuit, who with dangling rein, and both hands planted on the pommel, lifts himself bodily every now and then off the rack of his by no means "too easy" saddle, fully expresses the sentiments of his comrades, when he replies, with a certain grim and melancholy humour:

"Oh, glaziers be 'anged! Joseph's got 'is own little broken bottles to sit upon!"

The "carriage company" are more at their ease, though even they find the seats a trifle hard and slippery, and have to hold on with considerable tenacity to prevent themselves from sliding over on to the horses' backs. Still they have time to look about them, and look dutifully accordingly at the new phenomenon as a part of the appointed programme, which, being paid for, must of course be gone through. But beyond an occasional "Oh, that's it, is it?" "Don't think much of that," and so forth, the only comment it draws forth is from a worthy old lady in dim black satin, who, evidently smitten with a great awe of the daring feat she is performing, has never yet been heard to speak above her breath, and who at home, I take it, devotes herself to promoting the general happiness of mankind through the medium of furnished apartments.

"Lor-a-mussy! Alexandrina, my dear," she cries to her buxom daughter—after gazing intently for several minutes at the irregular pile of pale grey-blue fragments thickly powdered with white—"whatever do it remind one of?"

And her buxom daughter answers promptly:

"I know, ma. Of course, so it does—Starch."

And this is not our only disillusion. We have reached our hotel and climbed to our attics, and looked out our things for the wash, and taken our places, very late, of course, at the table d'hôte, where a more than usually patronising head-waiter rebukes us for our tardiness with considerable severity. And now, just as dinner is nearly over, we are informed that, if we wish to see the sun set, he is now on the point of going through that remarkable performance. Of course, we do want to see the sun set, and of course, therefore, we all jump up forthwith, except some half-dozen oldstagers who have seen sunsets enough, and hurry out into the balcony, from which a first-rate view is to be had of the old monarch, up whose green-slippered feet the evening shades are already beginning to steal. It is a beautiful sight, certainly, especially as the glittering white summit deepens duskily into gold, and the gold flashes into tenderest pink, and the pink fades slowly into cold, cold white again, backed by the steely blue of the darkening sky. But honestly, except for this one feature, which,

lovely as it is, is not an absolute phenomenon, and which above all occupies but a very small place in the general landscape, I have seen scores and scores of sunsets in England, to which this could not for a moment be compared. But then—"Wait a bit," says some knowing one, "watch the afterglow." And so we wait and watch for a considerable period. But all the time the night darkens steadily, and the only afterglow we see is a round red light at the little roadside restaurant of the Pierre Pointue, where the summit-path strikes off across the great glacier, and every now and then a tiny streak of sparks a few hundred feet higher up on the other side, as the travellers at the Grand Mulets exchange salutes with the enthusiastic hotel-keepers down below, whose disinterested enthusiasm for the adventure never flags, though it be made half-a-dozen times a week throughout the season. Then we look at one another and laugh, and the knowing one looks foolish, and I speculate in my own mind whether the afterglow can be "played out," too.

Before the sun rises again the tour comes to an abrupt termination for one of us. It is hardly daylight, when a pleasant little dream of a "played-out" glacier thundering down the Bayswater Road on its way to Shepherd's Bush, melts gradually into a tremendous knuckle-performance at my door. In another moment I am rubbing my astonished eyes over a mysterious missive for which twenty francs are to be paid, and a receipt signed, setting forth its due delivery before five A.M.

"Lau. 4.15 P.M.

"Dr D.,—Just hd tel fr J. All rt w D. P. Only 2 g's col to strt w, but the x's r lib & y r safe f reg stff if appd. They r i a D o a stte o mind abt C., who hs thrn thm oer f the J. Catch dil 7 A.M. & yll b i time f Fri's boat for Brin, & beat hm by a wk! L. o C enc wh yll h time f at Gen, & I'll b w y if pos at ston 3.18.—Gt haste f trn—Ys alwys—P. S."

It seems to me that the played-out avalanche must somehow have got amongst the alphabet. But even that will not account for an unknown P. S.—which, so far as I am concerned, certainly stands for Perfect Stranger—addressing the débris to me as Doctor Dolly. Then I turn to a square sheet of thin blue letter-paper which has fluttered out upon the floor, and a light breaks in upon me. It is a letter of credit, endorsed by Peter Shanks to —.

I give one screech of delight, jump head-foremost into a skirt and a waterproof, and in half the time it takes to tell am hammering in at Dick's door in my turn.

In another half-hour or less we are in the *salle-à-manger*, where a drowsy waiter is setting forth such items of food in the way of cold lumps of veal, milkless coffee, and so forth, as he can lay his unwashed paws on at that time in the morning without previous ordering, whilst Dick, with his bag by his side, waiting open-mouthed for the things which our never-failing shepherd has himself gone to recover from the *blanchisseuse*, draws me into a quiet corner and expounds the riddle of Mr. Shanks's hieroglyphic epistle. Only that very morning had Mr. Shanks received from the proprietors of The Daily Pantophone a pressing invitation to transfer his allegiance from The Phonograph, and go out as what Mr. Shanks himself would no doubt call their "Sp. Cort." to Cyprus. This offer Mr. Shanks, nowise desirous of a change, had managed, in view of the desertion of the faithless Mr. C., to get transferred to Dick, with the sure prospect, if his work be approved, of taking the faithless Mr. C.'s place on what Mr. Shanks calls the "reg. stiff."

Poor old Dick! He is pretty nearly in as great a flutter at this unexpected piece of good luck as I am, though he is more stoical about it of course. He even makes difficulties at first about me. These, however, I put down very unceremoniously. I am quite old enough, and—"and ugly enough?" queries Dick, saucily. But I am not to be put off in that way, and continue firmly—quite old enough and experienced enough to take care of myself during the two or three months he will be away; and as for the proprieties of the journey home, good old Mrs. Crumpelhorne I know will see to that. Then, at Mrs. Crumpelhorne's name, there comes a wistful look into the boy's eyes. He makes an odd little sound, half cough and half laugh, and has just got as far as, "I say, Dolly, old fellow—" when in comes our shepherd with the *blanchissage*, and cuts him short. But Dick's eyes are a good deal easier to read than Mr. Shanks's abbreviations. It is not such a very long journey up to the attics, after all, and somehow, before I have been back again a quarter of an hour, a certain natty little foulard dress sweeps across the hall, and Dick, bolting his last lump of cold veal whole, and sending a great gulp of milkless coffee the wrong

way after it, upsets two chairs and a waiter, and vanishes like a flash.

Half an hour later Nellie Rivers and I are sauntering slowly in the track of the fast-vanishing cloud of dust, in the midst of which the huge two-decker diligence is bearing Dick away on his new mission. Whether Miss Nellie is laughing or crying I don't quite know, and I am not quite sure that she knows herself. Between us, however, we manage to forget all about breakfast, and are not a little horrified when, by-and-by, a reflected ray from the now rapidly mounting sun reflects itself upon us, as from an approaching eyeglass, and Mr. Neville himself marches up with the information that the expedition up the Flégère has started without us, and that, now the shepherd is no longer there to restrain her, it is more than probable that by this time poor Mrs. Crumpelhorne is on her way to Cyprus in search of us.

Whereon we laugh, and look at our watches, and find that it is actually past ten o'clock. And Nellie and I look at one another, which is a foolish thing to do under the circumstances, and Nellie's quick colour comes flying up as she remembers what it was that has kept us so fully employed all this time. She blushes more furiously still as Mr. Neville, who is by no means given to hand-shaking, or, indeed, to demonstrations of any kind, puts out his hand and gives hers an actual squeeze. Indeed, I think poor Mrs. Crumpelhorne's nervousness must somehow have affected him, for when it comes to my turn he seems disposed to retain possession of my hand altogether. It must be at least half a minute before he gives it a final little grip, and drops it at last with a murmured, "Good fellow—Dick."

I suppose I must have taken the infection from Nellie. Certainly, when you come to think of it, there is no reason why one should colour up because one's own brother is called a good fellow. But somehow I feel my own cheeks getting almost as warm as hers, and rush off to relieve poor Mrs. Crumpelhorne's anxiety at a pace which gives Mr. Neville and Nellie some trouble to follow. When we do arrive at the hotel, we find her perhaps less disturbed than our guilty conscience has expected to find her; but, on the other hand, the ready kindness with which she enters upon her new office as my chaperon, the pretty things she says about poor old Dick, and the genial warmth and motherliness of her manner towards

us all, the stately Mr. Neville included, are, at least, as much in excess of any anticipation I, at all events, have ventured to form. What she can be saying to Mr. Neville during that long tête-à-tête they have this afternoon, or why she should be in such a beaming humour all the rest of the day, and so peremptorily determined upon cashiering my poor old brown straw hat, and endowing me, under pain of forfeiting her chaperonship, with a most coquettish new one, of which she positively refuses to let me even hear the price, is more than I can say. The purchase of that hat, and of another for Nellie, and of various other little remembrances for nephews and nieces and friends at home, takes up nearly the whole of the time till table d'hôte, when Mrs. Crumpelhorne orders a special bottle of champagne, and startles me not a little by whispering in my ear an emphatic, "God bless you, my dear," as she lifts the first glass to her smiling lips.

Next morning we set out upon our last Alpine expedition. The Flégère, I am afraid, has not been altogether a success, the general opinion seeming to be that they'd just been up a big hill and down again. To-day, however, we are to get something more than a mere "view." We are to make our first personal acquaintance with a glacier: the famous Mer de Glace itself. On Monday we turn our faces fairly homeward, only making one night's pause at Geneva on our path to Paris, where our shepherd breaks his staff, and the flock disperses to its several pastures. So to-day is to be a great day, and everybody is anxious that it shall go off with éclat. Checksuit in particular has got himself up quite regardless of expense, in a brilliant scarf of cherry-coloured satin, constructed in the shape of a vast and symmetrical sailor's knot, and further ornamented with a gorgeous crystal pin, specially purchased, I believe, for the occasion, at the biggest "curio" shop in the village. As for the blue and scarlet socks of "hextra" size which he has also purchased, with the view of drawing them over his boots for safety on the ice, they must be seen to be believed in; whilst the bright green veil tied round his hat, to keep off the glare of the snow, appropriately finishes off a real mountaineering costume.

Even Mr. Neville has at last endowed himself with an alpenstock, being, moreover, somewhat to my surprise, recognised

by one of our guides as an old member of the Alpine Club. The man's astonishment at finding him in our company is, perhaps, more amusing than complimentary. But the recognition has, at all events, the advantage of leaving us considerably freer in our movements, the guides apparently recognising our escort almost as one of themselves, and considerably relaxing in our favour the somewhat oppressive attention with which, from the moment we set our feet upon the ice, they inexorably hedge in the rest of the party.

And, it must be admitted, not without reason. The first portion of our track across the great glacier is by no means so slippery as we have anticipated. It is in fact, as Miss Lydier indignantly declares, "disgracefully dirty," and the dirt and the snow together contrive to render it in the hot noonday sun more like a London pavement in a brisk thaw, than anything we have previously imagined of the eternal snow and ice. Gradually, however, as we advance farther upon the glacier, this objectionable feature wears away, and the frozen sea stretches its white expanse around us with its glittering surface unmarred by any stain. Here and there a pale blue half-transparent cliff raises itself up out of the white expanse, or a distant break in the surface line shows the track of one of these "crevasses" of which we have heard so much, but from any closer acquaintance with which our guides are careful to keep their anything but sure-footed charge. Checksuit, indeed, is somewhat difficult to hold. His distinctly expressed opinion is, that crevasses are all "umbug, and as the first strangeness of the scene begins to wear off, some of the junior members of the party come round to his views. As for the voluble remonstrances, French, German, and Italian, of the guides, they have no effect whatever; and it is only the positive declaration of our shepherd that if any member of his flock breaks bounds, he will incontinently march the whole of us off the glacier again, that produces the smallest result.

In the midst of the somewhat warm debate that follows, Mr. Neville whispers a word of explanation to our shepherd, calls aside the guide who recognised him at the start, and the two march me off between them round a projecting block of ice, and up a steepish slope on the other side. Then very gently and cautiously we make our way down another and rather longer slope, to what appears to be the

foot of a low, but perfectly perpendicular cliff of ice. In another minute we have reached, not it, but the edge of a chasm, which in truth yawns between us and it, and I find myself on the verge of a veritable "crevasse."

Apparently the solid ice has split, and the portion on which we are standing, has sunk some twenty feet or so below the level of the farther part, and inclining slightly towards it. To our right the two masses touch, or so nearly that the narrow crevice between is filled solidly with drifted snow. But to our left it opens out rapidly, and we can see down, down hundreds of feet into the clear blue shining depths, which, so far as our eyes can tell us, stretch down to the very valley itself thousands of feet below. It is a wonderful sight; all the more striking for the suddenness with which we have come upon it, and my fingers close tightly upon the hands that grasp them carefully on either side. Then suddenly from behind us comes a voice:

"I'm a lookin' at you!"

And turning with a start, there is Check-suit in the very act of crossing the ridge.

I see a strange look come into the guide's face, as simultaneously he and Mr. Neville shout out a vehement injunction to the newcomer to stay where he is. But Check-suit pays no heed; indeed, he has already crossed the crest, and is sliding rapidly down straight towards where I stand. Then the world begins to turn round with me. I hear Mr. Neville's short sharp command to the guide to let go my hand, and see the guide himself set his teeth under his whitened lips, and brace himself for the coming shock. I hear, too, Checksuit, laughing—"Here we come; look out below!"—close upon me, and then a strong arm whirls me suddenly on one side, and my heart stops altogether for the time, and I neither see nor hear anything more.

ALL OR NOTHING.

BY MRS. CASHEL HOEY,

AUTHOR OF "A HOUSE OF CARDS," "GRIFFITH'S DOUBLE,"
&c. &c.

CHAPTER XV. IN POSSESSION.

It was with a feeling of relief that, on their arrival in London, Edward Dunstan parted for a while with Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. The cheerfulness, the light-hearted equanimity that made Esdaile a delightful companion to a man of Dun-

stan's temperament in fair-weather times, were trying in the reverse. It was not that Sir Wilfrid did not perceive the dramatic side of the contretemps that had occurred in Dunstan's life, he did see it very clearly, and with the almost startled surprise that anything which has a dramatic side to it arouses in a person whose life has hitherto run in grooves of pleasant but commonplace incident; but there was nothing in his own experience to teach him the bitterness of a sentimental sorrow, nothing to make him understand how such a sorrow could take the good out of the reversal of misfortune that had happened to Dunstan.

When, by common though unspoken consent, they had dropped the subject of Mrs. Thornton, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had also dropped it from his thoughts, after a brief reflection that it was an additional bit of luck for Dunstan, if he could see it, that the Thorntons were going abroad. If they came back to London next season, and Dunstan met them, he would be all right by that time; he would have found life so much jollier with as much money as he wanted. From which sage process of thought on his part it would appear that there was concord between the views of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile concerning his friend and those of Lady Rosa Chumleigh concerning her daughter, and that neither of them regarded the woes of the affections with much seriousness or respect.

This concord arose, in the respective cases of Lady Rosa Chumleigh and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, from precisely opposite causes. Lady Rosa had been in love in her time, and had seen what came of the passion when imprudently inspired and recklessly gratified. This was the only point conceivably within possibility upon which it could have occurred to Lady Rosa to think that it might have been better had the Ness characteristic of imperious self-will, and the Ness faculty of trampling down every kind of opposition, been somewhat less forcibly developed in her own person. She was accustomed to watch the spreading of the Ness alliances, the widening of the Ness borders, the increase of the Ness influence in political and social spheres, with a sour jealousy. She never gave utterance to this feeling, because to do so would have been bad policy, implying less stringency in the bonds of kinship than that which she desired should be recognised by her world,

but it helped to harden her against the admission of the claims of the heart in the administration of the business and interests of life.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, as has been before said, had never been in love, and his manner of regarding the sorrows of the tender passion lacked the gentleness of fellow-feeling. He had never felt the pain, and might readily believe that for his neighbour to complain was weakness.

Though Dunstan was glad to be alone for awhile, he did not regret that he had induced Sir Wilfrid to return to England with him, and to promise to accompany him to Bevis. There would be so much to be done that Dunstan had no distinct notion of how to do, and there would be a lot of people to see, who would all be charmed with Sir Wilfrid. In his access of bitterness of feeling, Dunstan was prepared to find himself unpopular in the neighbourhood where the admiral had been so much respected, and in his freshly put on cynicism he was prepared not to care. What did it matter? What did anything matter? He suffered from the sense of being befooled, a pain whose seat was his hurt pride; he reddened and tingled at the remembrance of the day-dreams he had indulged in during the voyage home, and which he had imparted to his friend with all the frankness of a shy man when he has conquered his shyness. Esdaile must remember them, Dunstan thought, as clearly as he remembered them himself; and how unutterably foolish he must be looking in Esdaile's eyes! Esdaile did remember them, but with no such effect; simply with the pleasant conviction that they would all realise themselves after awhile, even to the domestically-blissful portion of them, when Dunstan, as he told him, should have believed in the right woman.

The emptiness of London was a congenial state of things to Dunstan. He did not want to meet people, to whom he would have had to explain his appearance in the desert; or to be congratulated by others who might happen to know, and to remember, what had happened.

Not the house in Lowndes Street, which Colonel and Lady Rosa Chumleigh had occupied during Dunstan's absence in India, but one in Belgrave Road, had been the scene of his brief hope and disastrous disappointment. Of course he went to see it—though he would have been highly indignant with anyone who should have ventured to predict, that he would do

anything of the sort; and the actual occupants being out of town, he found it much as Sir Wilfrid had found the house in Lowndes Street. Dunstan walked to and fro in front of the dusty doorsteps, and the grimy windows, and, stepping back into the road, looked sulkily at an upper window. It was that of Laura's room, where he had watched the light, more than once, "Like an idiot as I was," he said, in his discomfiture; then, not without a consciousness that he might have added, "and as I am," he walked away, just as he was unconsciously attracting the attention of a policeman on the alert for symptoms of the burglarious season, and suspicious of his reconnoitring air.

Dunstan had but little business to transact, apart from that connected with Bevis, and he got it quickly over. He could not have told exactly what he did with himself during those days. He walked a great deal in the empty parks, strolled into streets of whose existence he had previously been unaware, stared into the windows of print-shops, hung about bookstalls, read the newspapers, and went to such theatres as were open. He called on Mr. Cleeve at Lincoln's Inn Fields, but that eminent family lawyer had left town for the long vacation. He had not wished to see Mr. Cleeve particularly; he knew that all the affairs in his charge were in order, and the new owner of Bevis felt little curiosity or interest in the details. The dull days went by. If he had been going down to Bevis, as he had pictured to himself from the moment when he had taken in the full meaning of Mr. Cleeve's letter, to make preparations for the reception of Laura, to select her rooms and order their adornment, to get ready the shrine for the goddess; ah, then, indeed, time would have flown! There were moments when he hated the place, and the ownership of it; there were moments of strong temptation to him to turn his back on England, without even seeing the fair-seeming heap of dust and ashes that Fate had given to him in mockery, and to seek for active service in the military ranks of some power less peaceful than England. He could be a soldier once more, Dunstan thought, if only he could be certain that it would be real soldiering.

These moods came and went; that which remained with him always was profound ennui. He thought with downright envy of John Sandilands, and said to himself that he should not be surprised

if all this were to end in his getting out of civilised life altogether. Dunstan did not know anything about that denunciatory lover who proclaimed his wrongs at Locksley Hall, but he was down with the like malady, and there was similarity both in the symptoms of the disease and in the behaviour of the patient.

One day it occurred to Dunstan to look at the unset jewels that he had bought at Ceylon. He had rejected opals, he remembered, because Laura might possibly have been weak enough to think them unlucky! What sort of luck had these soft cats'-eyes with their milky gleam brought him? He recalled how, when he bought them, he had felt, for the first time in his life, what it was to spend money without caring how much, and what a pleasant sensation that was. He was not in a humour just yet to reflect that a great deal of pleasure to be derived from that same source was within his reach; only the vanity and vexation of spirit that are of the essence of all human things were present to him. What should he do with these baubles? Throw them back into their box, and never look at them again? Take them to a jeweller and have them set? That would be something to do, a something painful, which jumped with his humour. Esdaile would marry some day; the cats'-eyes should be his wedding-present to Esdaile's wife.

Dunstan took the jewels to a famous shop, and asked to see some bracelets of the newest designs. The counter was speedily covered with beautiful and costly things, among which was one that took Dunstan's fancy. The shopman informed him that the bracelet in question, of their own design, had been very much admired, and ran glibly through a list of names of great people who had purchased specimens of the same that season, and concluded by saying:

"We have just executed an order, in cats'-eyes, which I can let you see."

He spoke to an assistant, who presently brought a cardboard-box, containing a velvet-covered case. A card, with an address upon it, lay in the outer box, and the plainly written words caught Dunstan's eye. They were: "Mrs. Thornton, Villa Tiberio, Naples."

Remarking that it was fortunate the bracelet had not yet been packed, as the effect of the cats'-eyes in combination with the new design might be seen, the shopman opened the velvet case, and displayed the beautiful ornament within. He was

not a little disappointed at the dry assent with which his own praise of the bracelet was received, and by the abruptness with which the new customer—a natural curiosity at that time of year—told him to set the jewels he left with him in a similar fashion, and to send the bracelet to Bevis.

The incident was not one to render Dunstan more cheerful, and it supplemented in an odd sort of way the semi-superstitious feeling with which he had recalled the purchase of the precious stones.

He returned to his hotel, and found a letter from Esdaile. It began by anticipating Dunstan's surprise when he should discover that Esdaile had already invaded Suffolk on his own account, and went on to give an animated account of his visit to the old ladies at Bury House, and of the resources of the country, absolutely exclusive of sport, and with no other male society than that of the nearest parson, whose notions chiefly ran on ruins and fishing. Sir Wilfrid then explained that the opportunity of fulfilling John Sandilands' behests with regard to Miss Carmichael had been offered to him by the invitation of the old ladies, as she was staying at Bury House. "I could say a great deal about her," he added, "only that the subject would naturally be unacceptable to you. I find I am within a few miles of Bevis, so that I can drive over and join you on the tenth, in time for dinner. I shall know the place as well as you do, for Miss Monroe, who has taken up her abode with the Misses Sandilands, not only describes Bevis with enthusiasm, but has made a number of very clever water-colour drawings of all her favourite views." Sir Wilfrid concluded his letter with certain instructions relative to dogs and guns, which Dunstan received with pleasure. He should have something to do until the time came for his going down to Bevis. He almost wished he had named an earlier day; but he did not like to change his plan now; it would be troublesome to the people at the place. He wished Esdaile had said more about Miss Carmichael. Why should he suppose he would feel any dislike to her, if that was what he meant by the subject being "unacceptable" to him? Nothing could be plainer than that Laura's cousin was a different person from Laura herself, for she was not only engaged to a poor man, but constant to him, through a long term of waiting, without any very brilliant prospect at the end of it. It would be

refreshing to make the acquaintance of a young lady of this uncommon kind. The great deal about her that Sir Wilfrid could have said was evidently in her favour. Perhaps Miss Carmichael was no better than the rest of them, and would throw John Sandilands over for Sir Wilfrid, if she got the chance. He liked her, certainly, but she never would get the chance. Sir Wilfrid was loyalty itself to his friends. Disappointment, jealousy, anger, spleen, and idleness had told on Dunstan's disposition, but he had not yet descended to utter scepticism. He had renounced all faith in love, but he still believed in friendship.

So poor Miss Monroe was there too! He felt rather ashamed of himself when he came upon the mention of her in Esdaile's letter. He had never thought about her since he came to England. Of course, had he found Mr. Cleeve in town, he should have remembered to ask him whether he knew what provision Mrs. Drummond had made for her companion—he never doubted that she had made some—but, as it was, he had forgotten her. It had never occurred to him, in his visions of Laura at Bevis, that one who had long lived there and loved the place had been banished from it; and in his bitterness of spirit he had been as forgetful and as selfish as in his joy. He did not reproach himself painfully—Dunstan's conscience was of the easy-going, tolerant kind—but he was just a little ashamed. Poor girl! Of course she must have felt the loss of her old friend—he remembered that Mrs. Drummond was very kind to her—and leaving the place, especially if she was so fond of it as Esdaile said. If things had only been as he had hoped, she might have been there as much as she liked, with Laura. Even as things were, he ought to be civil to her; and he was sorry he had not thought of it before. It would be a dull life for her with the two old school-mistresses, but she had not had a lively one at Bevis. He remembered that he had thought her a nice looking girl, rather peculiar, not in his style—Dunstan's style was Laura—and with a remarkably musical speaking voice. His last visit to Bevis, after the admiral's death, had been so unpleasant, and during it his mind had been so full of his untoward love that he had hardly any distinct remembrance of Miss Monroe in connection with it. Yes, he had one; it was of her beautiful playing, and the relief it afforded him, while turning the leaves of Miss

Monroe's music books, and thinking uninterruptedly of Laura. He hoped she had been left by Mrs. Drummond above the necessity of becoming a companion to some other old lady who might be more intolerable; and what Esdaile said of her having "taken up her abode at Bury House" looked like it. He wished he had written to her, had ascertained her wishes about her movements; he felt exceedingly uncomfortable at the reflection that she might possibly have been still at Bevis when he wrote to the housekeeper, and thus been made to feel herself completely ignored. What a blunder he had made! It could not be undone, however, and the only way in which he could repair it was by getting Esdaile to introduce him at Bury House at the earliest opportunity. Afterwards, he promised himself, he would not fail in civility to Miss Monroe. As, however, his negligence had been of a kind which could not be repaired by any message sent through a third party, he made no allusion to Miss Monroe in his brief reply to Esdaile's letter.

On the following day Dunstan went out with more cheerful feelings. He had Esdaile's commissions to execute, a visit to his own tailor to make, and a new play to see. He was not a whit less unhappy, but he was distinctly less bored, and he was beginning to regard the going to Bevis with less distaste. The sight of the place would set all his wounds bleeding again, no doubt, but what matter? He wondered how long Miss Carmichael meant to remain at Bury House. It would never do to miss her. Of course she was in constant correspondence with her cousin. He wondered whether Laura had ever told her anything about him. If she had not, Miss Carmichael would speak freely of Laura to him, for he was certain of Esdaile's trustworthiness and discretion. The vehemence of Dunstan's anger was beginning to subside, and the old longing for the forbidden fruit was taking its place. She never could be anything to him now, but for all that he wanted to hear of her; and he was sometimes angry with himself when he remembered the disdain with which he had rejected that woman-like suggestion of hers that they might assume the relative position of "old friends."

The arrival of the new owner of Bevis was a quiet and unostentatious proceeding; nevertheless, the fact that Captain Dunstan had arrived reached to remote parts of the neighbourhood with great

celerity, owing to his having encountered at the railway station a lady and a gentleman who immediately claimed acquaintance with him. They were Mr. Ainslie and his daughter Amabel, and they were going down to The Chantry. Miss Ainslie was very voluble in her congratulations, her expressions of pleasure at meeting him again, and her satisfaction at the realisation of her first notion about him, i.e. that he was coming home to Bevis.

"You see I was quite right, after all," she said; "I am always right about people, somehow; I always know whether they're going to be lucky or unlucky. I can't explain it, and mamma says it's nonsense. Papa is a little afraid of it, and thinks it may be second sight inherited from my Scotch ancestors. All I know is that I do have notions about people, and that they're never wrong. I felt you were in for a run of luck, even when you had the spell of fever."

Dunstan laughed, and handed Miss Ainslie into the carriage. Her papa, who looked as brown and sun-dried as ever, and rather more dejected, followed her, and then Dunstan stepped in.

"It is a large item in the run to have met you and Mr. Ainslie to-day," he said, "I should not have thought you would have been in London."

"We are furnishing," said Mr. Ainslie, in his dismal way, "and Amabel makes me go up to town every ten days or so, to see suites and specimens of decorative art, and things I never heard of."

"Hush, papa, you know you like it," said Amabel, in her old imperious, but affectionate way. "You must come to see us very soon at The Chantry, Captain Dunstan, and you will be so pleased that you will want to turn Bevis out of windows, and in again. But now that all my parcels are disposed of, and I am comfortably settled, you must tell me your adventures since we said good-bye at Galle. Never mind papa; he can't talk in a train, but he's deeply interested, I assure you."

Dunstan gave the vivacious young lady a brief account of his doings, and on her questioning him as to his motive for delaying in London instead of visiting his newly-acquired property at once—"Papa hurried us off to The Chantry in the most inhuman manner; that's why I have to take him to town so often," she added

parenthetically—he said frankly that he hated the idea of going to a big place like Bevis all alone, and had waited until a friend could join him.

"Where's the friend then?" asked Miss Ainslie, with a comical look; "have you dropped him on the platform?"

Dunstan explained that circumstances had prevented their coming down together, but that his friend would join him in the evening.

"I am speaking of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile," he added. "He had not the pleasure of seeing you when we landed at Galle. We came home together, and Mr. Gilchrist entrusted a parcel for you to his care."

"Yes, I know; Mr. Gilchrist talked of him, and would call him 'Tom Esdaile's boy.' You remember, papa?"

Mr. Ainslie remembered, but was not interested.

"Bring him to The Chantry as soon as you can, Captain Dunstan. I am dying to know what it is my dear old godfather has sent me; and I should like to see Sir Wilfrid Esdaile on his own account. Somehow I fancy, from what Mr. Gilchrist said, I shall not see the lucky look about him."

"There you have made a bad shot," said Dunstan, "for Esdaile is the spoiled child of good fortune, the happiest and the best fellow I ever knew."

"You do not look so wonderfully happy as I should have expected," Miss Ainslie was thinking, as she went on talking about the neighbourhood, and the country, and giving Dunstan so much information about places and people that he was lost in wonder at how she had contrived to learn so much in so short a time. At a station before that for Bevis Mr. Ainslie and his daughter left the train, and Dunstan was alone for the remainder of the journey.

A carriage was waiting for him, and a few bystanders looked curiously at him as he passed through the little station. The respectful salutations of the coachman and footman, strangers to him, formed his sole welcome; and it was with a sense of solitariness which overbore the natural excitement of the occasion, that the new master of Bevis approached his home.

It was already late, and Captain Dunstan had not had time for more than a few words with the housekeeper, and a general approval of the rooms that had been prepared for his occupation, when Sir Wilfrid Esdaile arrived.

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